

AGENDA ITEM #12

September 12, 2003

To: Delta Protection Commission

From: Margit Aramburu, Delta Protection Commission

Subject: Briefing on Decker II Habitat Restoration Project, Decker Island, Solano County
(For Information, Public Hearing and Possible Commission Action)

Staff Recommendation:

Accept briefing on the proposed Decker II project, accept public comments, and if appropriate adopt position of support for the proposed project.

Background:

The Delta Levees Subvention Program requires that implementation of the program result in "net habitat improvement". Department of Water Resources (DWR) and Department of Fish and Game (DFG), who oversee implementation of the program, design and construct the projects that result in "net habitat improvement", rather than requiring that the individual Reclamation Districts do this. The net habitat improvement projects are funded from the Levee Subvention budget, under the category "Special Projects".

The proposed 10-acre restoration project described in the attached memo prepared by DWR staff is located in the Primary Zone, on a 35-acre parcel of land owned by Department of Fish and Game, that was previously used as a dredge material disposal site. The project would not impact agriculture; there are no levees on the island. While the site was historically used for public hunting, the loss of the site (35 acres) that was accessible only by boat is offset by new hunting programs on DWR lands on Twitchell and Sherman Islands, that are managed by DFG.

The adjoining lands are largely used for dredge material disposal. An adjacent low-lying parcel owned by the Port of Sacramento has no active management or land use.

A negative declaration for the project has been circulated through the State Clearinghouse.

Tentative Findings of Consistency with Delta Protection Act and Land Use and Resource Management Plan for the Primary Zone of the Delta:

Public Resources Codes Section 29705 states "The Legislature further finds and declares that the delta's wildlife and wildlife habitats, including waterways, vegetated unveeved channel islands, wetlands, and riparian forests and vegetation corridors are highly valuable providing critical wintering habitat for waterfowl and other migratory birds using the Pacific Flyway, as well as certain plant species, various rare and endangered wildlife species of birds, mammals, and fish, and numerous amphibians, reptiles, and invertebrates, that these wildlife species and their habitat are valuable, unique and irreplaceable resources of critical statewide significance, a that it is the policy of the state to preserve and protect these resources and their diversity for the enjoyment of current and future generations".

Public Resources Codes Section 29706 states "The Legislation further finds and declares that the resource values of the delta have deteriorated, and that further deterioration threatens the maintenance and sustainability of the delta's ecology, fish and wildlife populations, recreational opportunities, and economic productivity".

Environment Policy P-1 states "The priority land use of areas of prime soil shall be agriculture. If commercial agriculture is no longer feasible...land uses which protect other beneficial uses of Delta resources, and which would not adversely affect agriculture on surrounding lands, or viability or cost of levee maintenance, may be permitted..."

Environment Policy P-3 states "Lands managed primarily for wildlife habitat shall be managed to provide several inter-related habitats. Deltawide habitat needs should be addressed in development of any wildlife habitat plan..."

Environmental Recommendation R-2 states "Wildlife habitat on the islands should be of adequate size and configuration to provide significant wildlife habitat for birds, small mammals and other Delta wildlife."

Environmental Recommendation R-3 states "Undeveloped channel islands provide unique opportunities for permanent wildlife habitat in the Primary Zone..."

Environmental Recommendation R-4 states "Feasible steps to protect and enhance aquatic habitat should be implemented as may be determined by resource agencies consistent with balancing other beneficial uses of Delta resources."

Environmental Recommendation R-5 states "Publicly-owned land should incorporate, to the maximum extent feasible, suitable and appropriate wildlife protection, restoration and enhancement as part of a Deltawide plan for habitat management."

Decker Island Construction Description

The Decker Island Habitat Enhancement Project consists of excavating material on Decker Island to create tidal wetlands and upland habitat. The project site is located on the northern tip of Decker Island of which 34 acres is owned by the California Department of Fish & Game. The material excavated from Decker Island will be used to reinforce levees on Bradford, Jersey and Van Sickle Island (Figure 1). Phase I of the project consisted of excavation of 14 acres of the property to create tidal wetlands and upland habitat. The proposed project, Phase II, would excavate the area between Phase I and the southern property line to create an additional 10 acres of habitat.

The existing topography of Decker Island is shown on Figure 2. The northern half of the property was excavated in 2001 and is subject to daily tidal inundation. The hatched area in Figure 2 is the area under the mean high water, elevation 3.5 feet NGVD. All of the areas planned for excavation in Phase II are above the mean high water. Figure 3 shows the proposed topography of the island along with the area inundated by the mean high water once Phase II is completed.

All of the excavation for Phase II will occur in the “dry”. The final contours were designed such that all of the excavation could occur without the tides flooding the newly excavated area. The contractor will excavate the area to the design contours but will leave a temporary plug at location 1 shown in Figure 2. As part of the finishing operation on Decker Island, the plug will be removed using an excavator. The excavation of the plug will be the only material excavated below the mean high water. During excavation of Phase II material, the contractor will avoid and minimize any impacts to the Phase I habitat vegetation.

Approximately 270,000 cubic yards of material will be excavated from the Phase II operations on Decker Island. The excavation will be performed using conventional earth moving equipment, an excavator and dozer. The excavator will load the material onto dump trucks, which will then transport the material to the conveyor and/or stockpiled temporarily. The conveyor will be setup at location 2 on Figure 2, which will load the material onto a barge. Approximately four sets of temporary pilings will be driven into the bank to support the conveyor and moor the barge. No long-term impacts to existing vegetation along the bank are anticipated due to the loading operation and temporary pilings.

The material excavated from Decker Island will be transported to Bradford, Jersey, and Van Sickle Island. The contractor plans to off-load material on one island at a time. The material barge will be pushed to the islands via tugboat. Once at the off-loading site, the material will be off-loaded via two conveyors. One conveyor is setup on the barge with the material. A second conveyor will be setup on barge, which would receive the material from the first conveyor then convey the material to the landslide levee toe. Dozers will then push the material for placement on the levee toe. The second conveyor and barge will be moved daily within the job site thus no long term impacts to the waterside vegetation is anticipated.